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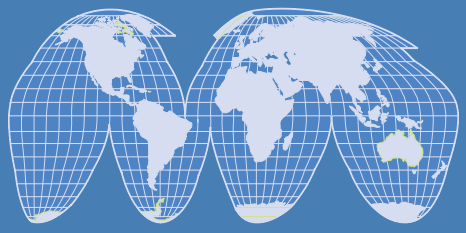

# Review of Assessment Activities

Issue 21

July/August 2006

## In this Issue

Hello to our friends and colleagues in the INES project. This July/August 2006 newsletter describes national-level activities in member countries related to measuring adults' skills, competencies, and related outcomes and qualifications. These activities include direct assessments of adults' reading or mathematical abilities, more general surveys related to adults' training and education, and surveys of employers on the skills of their workers. The article also highlights international and regional studies of adults.

Also included in this issue is a country highlight focusing on student assessment and testing in the Netherlands. The article presents an overview of Dutch primary and secondary education, including information on the organization of the education system, student testing and examination, and assessment and evaluation of school performance. The newsletter also provides updates on Networks A, B and C, the PISA Governing Board, and the Technical Group, and a brief look at what is currently happening in national and international assessment programs in member countries.

We thank all those who contributed to the newsletter, especially Renze Portengen, from the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science in The Netherlands, for preparing the article on the Dutch education system; Dan Andersson of Sweden for updating us on Network B; Jaap Scheerens and Maria Hendriks of The Netherlands for sharing information on Network C; and Michael Davidson of the OECD for providing an update on the Technical Group. We appreciate your efforts in keeping us informed of activities from around the INES Project. We hope you enjoy the latest newsletter.

## Assessments and Surveys on the Adult Population

One area of recent Network A development work has focused on developing the conceptual framework for the main assessment for OECD's planned Program for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC). As work is beginning on this program that will provide policymakers with data on the skills and competencies of adults, we thought it would be beneficial to highlight national-level activities and other international studies that member countries are engaging in to assess adult competencies and gather related information. Information for this article is based on responses from 11 countries: Australia, Austria, Denmark, France, Mexico, New Zealand, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Over half of the responding countries reported programs at the national level, either direct assessments of skills or surveys providing information on education level, training, or other outcomes (or both). Nearly all the responding countries have participated

in the past in an international or regional study on adults.

## Direct assessments of adults' skills

Five of the 11 responding countries have programs that directly assess the skills and competencies of adults. Four of these 5 countries (France, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and the United States) described assessments that primarily measure adults' ability to use written and quantitative information (e.g., literacy and numeracy)[1], among other subjects, and both France and the United Kingdom indicated that their assessments place particular emphasis on those individuals performing at the lowest levels. In contrast, New Zealand's program measures a less traditional domain, financial knowledge and skills.

In **France**, the French Institute of Statistics (INSEE) and the Ministry of Education (DEP) commissioned *Information et Vie Quotidienne* (IVQ), partly in response to the French results from the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) (see section on international and regional studies for more information). Although INSEE is largely responsible for IVQ, the survey is a collaboration of several organizations, including the DEP, the Ministry of Labor, the Institute of Demography, the national agency working against illiteracy, and a number of universities. Using everyday materials, the IVQ measures adults' skills in the domains of reading literacy, numeracy, and oral comprehension, placing particular attention on readers performing at the lowest levels. This assessment is computer based and thus allows for literacy and numeracy components that can adjust modules based on each participant's competency level. Additionally, an interviewer administers the assessment step-by-step, to try to provide an environment where the focus is more natural than with a greater emphasis on assessment booklets. Each assessment begins with an orientation module. Those individuals who perform poorly are then given questions from a simpler module designed for lower literacy levels. Those individuals who perform well are given questions from an advanced module. Intermediate modules exist as well, and the computer program is able to re-direct the participant to different modules throughout the assessment based on his or her results. The oral comprehension component is not adjusted for ability level and presents the same items to all participants. Frameworks for each domain were created by a team of researchers specializing in the particular field.

In addition to direct assessments on these three domains, the IVQ includes a detailed context questionnaire to collect data on demographic background, labor market experience, and education level, among other variables. The samples for the field trial and the first cycle were designed by INSEE and were taken from the national census, first choosing households from throughout the country and then choosing one adult from each selected household. The field trial took place in 2002, and the first survey cycle was conducted in 2004 with a sample of more than 10,000 adults between the ages of 18 and 65 years. The first results from this study have been released by INSEE, with additional analyses expected in the next few months. Analysis topics include adults at low levels of literacy, relationship between literacy skills and labor market status, and relationship between skills and educational attainment. IVQ surveys will likely be administered every five years.

The Skills for Life survey administered in the **United Kingdom** was a household survey that directly measured adults' literacy, numeracy, and information communication technology (ICT) skills, with the goal of assessing the impact that different levels of skill have on adults' lives. Like France's IVQ, this survey also paid special attention to those individuals performing at the lowest levels, as the assessment was designed to discriminate well at the lower end of the performance distribution. A number of organizations collaborated in this survey: it was commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), designed by the Centre for the Development and Evaluation of Lifelong Learning (CDELL) at the

[1] Although domains may be similarly named across various national programs, the exact definitions of domains, assessment frameworks, and items may differ.

University of Nottingham, and conducted by the British Market Research Bureau (BMRB). Interviews were conducted between June 2002 and May 2003 with approximately 8,700 randomly selected adults in England between the ages of 16 and 65 years. The survey consisted of two parts, with the first including a background questionnaire to collect behavioral and demographic data, a literacy assessment, and a numeracy assessment. The second part of the survey was administered to a sample of the respondents who had participated in the first part (approximately 4,600 adults) and consisted of two ICT components, an assessment on awareness and knowledge and an assessment of practical skills. The DfES released a research brief in 2003 providing an overview of results.

The *Estudo Nacional de Literacia* (ENL) (National Literacy Study) in **Portugal** measures prose literacy, document literacy, and quantitative literacy. ENL aimed to determine the population distribution across literacy levels and to identify adults' use of reading, writing, and arithmetic in both professional and personal settings. The survey was administered in 1994 by the *Instituto de Ciências Sociais da Universidade de Lisboa* (Social Sciences Institute of the Lisbon University), *Conselho Nacional de Educação* (Nacional Educational Council), and the *Fundação Calouste Gulbenkia*n (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation). The ENL was a 30-item written test and was administered to 3,000 adults between the ages of 15 and 64 years, who had been selected based on an employment survey conducted regularly by the *Instituto Nacional de Estatística*. Results from the survey were published in 1996 in *A Literacia em Portugal – Resultados de uma Pesquisa Extensiva e Monográfica*.

The **United States**' National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) also assesses the domains prose literacy, document literacy, and quantitative literacy. NAAL, sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) within the U.S. Department of Education, is a nationally representative assessment of adults aged 16 years and over. The purpose of NAAL is to measure adults' ability to used printed and written information to sufficiently function at home, at work, and in the community. The most recent administration of NAAL was in 2003 and 2004 and was conducted through in-person interviews with about 18,000 adults selected from a sample of over 35,000 households. In addition to the main literacy assessment, NAAL consisted of several additional components: a background questionnaire to help identify the relationship between adult literacy and certain demographic and background characteristics; a health literacy component to assess adults' abilities to use literacy skills in understanding health-related materials and forms; a fluency addition to measure adults' basic reading skills; and the adult literacy supplemental assessment to provide information on the ability of adults at the lowest levels of literacy. Initial results were published and released to the press in December 2005. In addition to the main study, NAAL also included two additional parts: a prison component and a state-specific component. Participants from both components were administered the same questionnaire and assessments as those in the main sample. The prison sample consisted of approximately 1,200 inmates from 107 federal and state prisons, who also were asked additional questions as part of the background questionnaire on prison experiences. The State Assessment of Adult Literacy (SAAL), voluntarily conducted in six states, provided information on adult literacy within each participating state. The SAAL sample consisted of approximately 1,000 participants from the state as well as the portion of the national sample drawn from that state.

In contrast to the more traditionally focused assessments described thus far, the Adult Financial Knowledge Survey in **New Zealand** sought to measure adults' financial knowledge and skills. Interviews were conducted in October and November 2005 with a nationally representative sample of about 850 adults aged 18 years and over. Results were published in March 2006 and will be used by New Zealand's Retirement Commission, which authorized the study, to tailor its public education programs.

## Surveys of adults

In addition to assessments that directly measure adults' competencies, New Zealand and the

United Kingdom also reported several other large-scale surveys targeting the adult population on their education level, participation in training, or other self-reported outcomes.[2] Both countries described these surveys as providing data, such as an adult's highest level of education, as possible proxies for skills. Statistics **New Zealand** administers a number of surveys that collect data on the highest level of education attained. These include a census conducted every five years, the Household Labor Force Survey, the New Zealand Income Survey, and the Household Economic Survey. Additionally, the Education and Training Survey, administered as a supplement to the Household Labor Force Survey in 1996, measured participation in adult education and training.

Like the Statistics New Zealand surveys, the **United Kingdom**'s National Adult Learning Survey (NALS) provides data on educational background, including the highest qualification attained. The survey, carried out by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen), is used primarily by the DfES to evaluate the effectiveness of its adult learning policies and to monitor progress in meeting the national learning target for adult participation. This household survey has been administered four times thus far, in 1997, 2000, 2001, and 2002. The 2002 cycle consisted of face-to-face interviews with about 6,600 adults aged 16 years and over in England and Wales. The survey asked participants about a variety of learning experiences, both formal and self-directed, within the last three years or since leaving full-time education. Results were published in a 2003 research brief by the DfES.

**Australia**, like New Zealand and the United Kingdom, also administers a number of surveys focused on adults, with the majority conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The Census of Population and Housing provides broad data on education, the labor force, income characteristics, and demographic data, while the General Social Survey covers a range of issues, including health, family relationships and engagement with wider social networks, educational opportunities and outcomes, employment, financial resources, housing, personal safety and security, and access to transportation. In relation to skill proxies, both surveys cover the variables of education level (such as highest level of schooling completed and school attendance/qualifications currently enrolled in), income, and labor force status. The Census is administered every five years to all Australians; the most recent survey was given in 2001 and the next data collection is scheduled for 2006. Census data are used by ABS for benchmarking and are reported through a number of methods, including various publications (e.g. *Social Atlas Series*, *Selected Social and Housing Characteristics*, and *Selected Education and Labour Force Characteristics*) and CD-roms providing community profiles. The General Social Survey collects data through personal interviews and was first conducted in 2002 with 15,500 people ages 18 and over. These results were published in December 2003 in a national-level publication. ABS plans to administer the survey every four years.

Besides the Census and the General Social Survey, ABS conducts two additional surveys that focus on adults education and training. The Survey of Education, Training, and Information Technology (SET) was first conducted in 1993 and takes places every four years. The most recent survey cycle, administered in 2005, collected information on educational attainment, participation in education, and training received over the past 12 months. SET 2005 was administered as a personal interview to 24,400 respondents between the ages of 15 and 64 years of age who were residents of private dwellings.

ABS's Survey of Education and Work is an annual data collection conducted each year in May that presents information on the educational experiences of people ages 15 to 64, especially in relation to their labor force status. Specifically, information collected in the survey includes the highest level of schooling completed, schooling in the current and previous year, unmet demand for edu-

[2] These types of surveys, which are administered in many countries in addition to those that responded to our request for information, may be sources of information for the indicators produced by Network B (relating to labor market outcomes) and the Technical Group (relating to educational attainment).

cation in the current year, and characteristics of apprentices. The survey is administered through a personal interview to a sample size of 65,000 adults, and results are reported in a national publication released in December of each year.

In addition to the ABS surveys, Australia also indirectly measures adults' skills through the Household Income and Labour Dynamics Australia (HILDA) Survey, a longitudinal panel study focusing on family and household formation, income, and work. Major variables covered include education level (the highest level of school completed and the age at leaving school), income, labor force status, and socio-economic background. While survey items generally are repeated from year to year, each survey wave also includes questions on an additional topic that is not covered every year. Additional topics covered thus far are: family background and personal history, household wealth, retirement and plans for retirement, and private health insurance and youth-specific issues (with data collected through questions asked only to those under age 30). Data are collected through face-to-face interviews in each household and through self-completed questionnaires for more sensitive information. The surveys are administered to a nationally representative sample of households and all individuals within each selected household. The Melbourne Institute releases a statistical report of results each year.

**Denmark** recently conducted a large-scale survey of adults as part of its work to develop an accounting of national competence. The purpose of this account is to form a basis for identifying strengths and weaknesses in national competences in order to provide information for policy initiatives. Administered by the Ministry of Education, the survey covered the working life of adults between the ages of 20 and 64 and measured 10 key competencies: social, literacy, communicative, self-management, democratic, ecological, cultural, physical, and creative and innovative competencies. Two surveys were administered between 2002 and 2005 to approximately 8,000 adults, with the 2004 main survey based on a questionnaire and conducted over the telephone. Results were published in 2005 and were used as a part of policy initiatives relating to a government council on globalization and a reform committee on adult education and training.

## Surveys of employers

In addition to assessments that directly measure adults' skills or surveys that provide information on adults' education or labor market or other outcomes, several countries reported conducting large-scale surveys of *employers* that aim to identify important skills and skills deficits in the workplace. **Austria** described a national study on foreign language competency, which was administered in 2005 by the Institute for Research on Education and Economy as part of the "Go International" initiative sponsored by the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Labor and the Austrian Economic Chamber. The study assessed the Austrian economy's need for the use of foreign languages and provided feedback on the quality of foreign language education and the demand for further training in the field of foreign languages. More than 2000 companies participated in the online survey.

Besides the foreign language study, Austria also produced a report on the recognition of skills and knowledge acquired outside the traditional routes of formal education and training. Because of the country's overall high quality of formal education and training, and the population's high educational participation rates, research on non-traditional routes was previously not seen as necessary. Thus, recognition of non-formal and informal learning did not become important until the early 1990s, and they are now becoming increasingly significant as the country undergoes considerable demographic changes and moves towards a knowledge-based economy. Companies are finding it increasingly useful to obtain reliable information on both formal and non-formal qualifications in order to avoid more time-consuming and often inconclusive screening procedures in the hiring of their employees.

**New Zealand** and the **United Kingdom** also both conduct large-scale surveys of employers. Statistics New Zealand administers the Quarterly Employment Survey, which collects data on number of employees by number of paid hours and hourly

earnings, among other variables. The survey measures outcomes related to adult employment but does not assess skills. The United Kingdom's Employer Skills Survey, commissioned by the DfES and carried out by the Institute for Employment Studies and Market & Opinion Research International (MORI), is designed to investigate the extent, causes, and implications of skill deficiencies in England. The survey was administered in 1999, 2001, and 2002, with the 2002 survey given to a sample of 4,000 employers who employ five or more workers. Conducted through telephone interviews between January and March 2002, this survey cycle also included follow-up interviews to further explore participants' understanding of some of the terminology and definitions used in the survey. Results were published in a research brief by the DfES in September 2002.

## International and regional assessments and surveys

While the extent and type of national-level activities related to the adult population varied among respondents, nearly all responding countries reported participating in international or regional assessments of adult skills. Most of the countries (**Australia**, **Denmark**, **France**, **New Zealand**, **Portugal**, **Sweden**, **Switzerland**, the **United Kingdom**, and the **United States**) took part in the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), administered between 1994 and 1998 to nationally representative samples of the adult population ages 16 to 65. This survey was designed to identify and to measure a range of skills linked to the social and economic characteristics of individuals across or within nations. It consisted of a background questionnaire that collected general information (e.g., demographic details and work history) and assessments of participants' prose literacy, document literacy, and quantitative literacy. The use and impact of the IALS data varied by country. Whereas some countries, such as **Sweden**, reported no known actions resulting from the survey, others stated that the survey had major impacts on policy. The **United Kingdom** indicated that IALS led to an expansion of the adult basic skills teaching provision, and **Denmark** reported that the results were used to initiate reforms on adult education and training and to form the basis for establishing a new adult education program for preparatory education in reading/writing and arithmetic at the basic level. **New Zealand** stated that the results contributed to the development of an adult literacy strategy, and **Portugal** used the data as comparison with its national-level adult assessment, ENL. In **France**, concerns over methodology and national results from IALS (which were not published for France) helped prompt the INSEE and the DEP to develop the IVQ, the national-level direct assessment of adult skills described earlier in this section. The 2002 field trial of the IVQ included items from IALS for one-third of the respondents in order to provide results comparable to IALS. Results showed 15 percent of French adults at the lowest level in prose literacy, much lower than what IALS had shown but consistent with results from the national assessment.

Four countries (**Australia**, **New Zealand**, **Switzerland**, and the **United States**) and one of **Mexico**'s federal states participate in the Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey (ALL). Like IALS, ALL measures the literacy and numeracy skills of a nationally representative sample of adults between the ages of 16 and 65 and consists of both a background questionnaire and a written assessment. The questionnaire collects general information about respondents (e.g., sex, age, race/ethnicity, education level, and labor force status) as well as more specific information related to literacy practices, familiarity with ICT, and health. The written assessment measures participants' literacy and numeracy.

Several countries also are participating in European regional surveys of adults. **Denmark** is involved in Eurostat's Continuing Vocational Training Survey (CVTS), and **Austria** also participates in two European surveys. The annual European Community survey on ICT usage in households and by individuals is a module within the European Labour Force Survey and involves the indirect assessment of ICT skills. Additionally, Austria plans to implement the indirect assessments of foreign language proficiency and ICT skills, which are options within the European Adult Education Survey (AES).

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**Study on foreign language competency**

E-mail the Institute for Research on Qualification and Training for the Austrian Economy
info@ibw.at

**Study on the acquisition of skills and knowledge outside traditional routes**

E-mail the Institute for Research on Qualification and Training for the Austrian Economy
info@ibw.at

**DENMARK**

**Survey on adult competences**

www.nrk.dk
www.uvm.dk

**FRANCE**

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**SWITZERLAND**

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**UNITED KINGDOM**

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**UNITED STATES**

**National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL)**

http://nces.ed.gov/naal/

## Network A

Network A last met in Seoul, Korea on March 9-10, 2006, where members discussed the areas of work conducted by the three working groups, including support for the Program for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), the database of national-level assessment and testing activities, and the development of innovative indicators for *Education at a Glance* (*EAG*) 2006.

The development working group has been concentrating on two activities: generating ideas for potential new developmental work and providing support for PIAAC. In relation to the first activity, some suggested areas of work so far have been related to exploring new assessment domains (e.g., multi-cultural literacy, second language competency, and entrepreneurial skills and attitudes) and new assessment techniques (e.g., computer-assisted testing and value-added indicators). With regard to the second activity (PIAAC), in June 2006, the Network convened an international panel of experts to address and make recommendations related to: the definition of the domain, the feasibility of a single scale of continuous reporting, and the options for the delivery of the assessment. The Network A Secretariat and the working group chair prepared a paper outlining the beginnings of a conceptual framework for the main assessment, which has been circulated to members for their comments. The paper will be revised based on members' feedback and will be submitted to the INES Strategic Management Group and the Joint Session of the Education Committee and the Center for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) Governing Board in October.

The data working group has been focusing primarily on its work to develop a database describing national-level assessment activities in OECD countries. The Network Secretariat and the data working group chair are working to finalize the database and to make the information available online in a user-friendly and updateable format before the end of the year.

The analysis, reporting, and dissemination working group, in conjunction with the Network Secretariat, prepared two indicators for *EAG* 2006, both of which draw on data from the 2003 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). The first indicator profiles low achievers (students at performance level one and below level one) in the mathematical literacy assessment, and the second analyzes institutional characteristics (e.g., tracking and grade retention policies) and their relationship with students' performance in mathematics.

The next meeting of Network A will be held on October 19-20, 2006, in Dublin, Ireland, following the PISA Governing Board meeting on October 16-18.

## Network B

Network B last met on March 8-10, 2006, in Washington, D.C., United States. The meeting focused on its development work related to PIAAC and the activities of the five working groups.

Network B is undertaking the development work for the background questionnaire for PIAAC. Working with the OECD Secretariat, several experts have been contracted to assist with the following activities: development of an analytic framework on youth transition systems; a paper on how PIAAC can best provide data and inform analyses of the aggregate economic returns to skills; and exploration of the development of an instrument to measure mathematical literacy. Future planned activities related to PIAAC include the development of an analytic framework for life-long learning (AFLLL) systems and a conceptual framework and items for the indirect assessment of health outcomes.

In addition to the PIAAC work, the working groups are continuing to make progress in their respective areas of work:

- *Adult learning*: This working group is focusing on two activities. First, the group is collecting data on policy goals/issues and indicators on adult learning through a short survey sent out to all members. Second, the group has established an e-mail network to provide feedback and input for Helmut Kuwan, the contractor preparing the Continuing Education and Training (CET) Module Project final report. The e-mail network is comprised of the countries financing the CET Module Project.

- *Monitoring transition systems (MTS)*: This working group circulated in June the final report, *A framework for monitoring transition systems*, prepared by Rolf K.W. van der Velden and Maarten H.J. Wolbers. The report included recommendations on data collection for *EAG*, a special OECD publication on MTS, and the use of the analysis for PIAAC. The Network is currently discussing the feasibility of these recommendations with the OECD Secretariat.

- *Social outcomes*: This working group is preparing a terms of reference for an indicator paper within the joint Network B and CERI social outcomes of learning (SOL) project.

- *Supply of skills*: This working group is in the process of completing initial analyses on supply of skills and is drafting a report outline. The group will discuss with the OECD Secretariat a proposal for publishing a final report.

- *Economic outcomes*: This working group has begun the preliminary work for collecting data on dispersion of earnings for *EAG* 2007. The data collection will officially begin in August or September 2006, with the database scheduled to be submitted to the OECD by January 2007.

The Network tentatively plans to meet for a special two-day plenary meeting in Paris, France, on November 27-28, 2006. The regular annual meeting will be held in either March or April 2007, in Dublin, Ireland.

## Network C

Network C last met in Oslo, Norway, on May 29-30, 2006, where members discussed the development of an index on teachers' working conditions; the development of new system-level indicators; and the international survey on teachers, teaching, and learning (TALIS).

For *EAG* 2006, Network C updated its three core indicators on teachers' working and teaching time, instructional time, and teacher salaries. For *EAG* 2007, the Network plans to develop an index on teachers' working conditions as well as an indicator on evaluation and accountability—one of three planned new system-level indicators.

For the short term (i.e., *EAG* 2007), the index on teachers' working conditions will be limited to data available from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS)/OECD/Eurostat (UOE) questionnaire and the Network C questionnaire (e.g., on class size, teaching time, working time and salaries) and new data to be collected on teachers' employment status and the flexibility of temporary leave (and other contractual arrangements). In the future, if data become available from TALIS, various components may be added to the index (e.g., on in-service training, support for teachers, the quality of facilities, the quality of instruction materials, opportunities for participation in professional development, and opportunities for collaboration and decision-making).

The Network also is working on developing three new system-level policy-related indicators: evaluation and accountability, equity, and administration costs. Following the last meeting, the Network Secretariat distributed to members concept papers and draft questionnaires related to each of the possible indicator areas in order to test their usefulness in collecting the desired information.

- *Evaluation and accountability*: This questionnaire on focused on evaluation arrangements, accountability profiles, and organizational infrastructure. It also included items to check data availability on budgets and units.

- *Equity*: This questionnaire was the most complex of the three and contained several highly inferential questions. Moreover, because the questionnaire was built on an elaborated version of the conceptual framework that had not been discussed yet within the Network, members were invited to test the questions and to

comment on clarity and feasibility, on which there were several issues.

- *Administration costs*: This questionnaire was designed to solicit members' personal opinions on the degree to which administration costs, associated with discussions about bureaucratization, are considered a relevant issue in Network C member countries. Ten out of 18 responding countries indicated that administration costs currently are an issue of fairly significant political relevance.

The next meeting of Network C will be in The Hague, The Netherlands, on December 6-8, 2006.

### Upcoming Meetings

October 16-18, 2006
PISA Governing Board (Ireland)

October 19-20, 2006
Network A (Ireland)

December 6-8, 2006
Network C (The Netherlands)

March or April 2007
Network B (Ireland)

## PISA Governing Board

The PISA Governing Board (PGB) last met on March 6-8, 2006, in Seoul, Korea. The main topics of discussion were: proposals for PISA 2009, progress on various PISA reports, and a new policy-oriented stream of work.

Members listened to presentations and Q&As on the proposals for the PISA 2009 assessment that had resulted from the international call for tender. Members discussed the proposals with each applying consortia's project directors, and the Technical Review Panel presented their findings on the proposals' technical quality, organization and management capabilities, and staff qualifications and previous experiences. Based on the discussion and presentation, the PGB elected to begin contractual negotiations with two different consortia. The first consortium was selected to carry out the work of designing the cognitive test for reading, mathematics, and science as well as the module on ICT delivery and assessment of ICT literacy. A second consortium was chosen to develop the context questionnaire. However, members did not find any of the proposals for the module on the assessment of a younger cohort to be of sufficient technical quality. Thus, the PGB decided to reopen the international call for tender for that module and to establish a joint OECD and the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) task force to advise the successful development and implementation of the module.

Next, the Editorial Group updated members on progress in the analytic work and development of thematic reports from the PISA 2003 cycle. Based on their suggestions, the PGB agreed to terminate the contract for the thematic report on mathematical literacy (performance and engagement) and to proceed with finalizing the thematic report on migration. Work also is continuing in the development of country profiles, and authors are considering the possibility of annotating national data to document comparability issues that will ensure appropriate trends analyses.

The OECD Secretariat made several presentations. The first introduced a timeline and draft outline for the initial report of PISA 2006 results, which will be released on December 4, 2007. Members approved the outline but added some suggestions, including: extending analysis of trends data, strengthening analysis of policy implications, and incorporating references to the computer-based science assessment component. The OECD Secretariat proposed a new stream of policy-oriented work that would complement PISA results with system-level information on key policy levers. Members' reaction to the proposal was mixed, as some countries expressed interest in participating in a pilot of this work while others expressed concern about the ambition and adequacy of the proposal. The PGB established that this work would extend beyond PISA and thus suggested leaving the decision to proceed and to develop this work to the Education Committee.

Last, members finalized and adopted a draft mandate for PISA for 2006 to 2011. The next PISA Governing Board meeting will take place in Dublin, Ireland on October 16-18, 2006.

## Technical Group

The Technical Group is responsible for approximately half of the indicators in *Education at a Glance* 2006, and thus a major part of its work focuses on their preparation. Several new indicators were developed for *EAG* 2006, including:

- new ratios of students to contact staff (teachers and teachers aides),
- link between demographic pattern and expenditure in percent of gross domestic product (GDP),
- expenditure per student for general and vocational programs (disaggregated),
- cumulative expenditure in primary and secondary education,
- new information on average tuition fees charged by tertiary institutions, and
- survival rates in tertiary education.

The TG's next steps were solidified in their last meeting on June 7-9, 2006, in Paris. First, members decided to target improvements to indicators in certain areas and to establish working groups to carry out these objectives:

- *Educational finance*: The emphasis will be on improving the quality of existing indicators on public and private expenditures, and members also will develop an ad-hoc data collection on financial aid to students.
- *Outputs and efficiency of the education system*: The emphasis will be on improving the reporting quality of graduate data, to evaluate possible indicators for measuring the output and efficiency of the education system, and on improving the methodology and reporting of the tertiary survival indicator.
- *Student mobility*: This work will focus on consolidating current indicators and exploring possible new indicators.
- *Adult education*: Work in this area will consist of clarifying definitions and concepts, reviewing and improving current reporting, and proposing new indicators.

In addition, members agreed to develop, in conjunction with data collection partners, a data revision policy for the UOE data collection that will provide for a coherent database with the capacity for consistent trend analysis.

# Country Highlight: The Education System in The Netherlands

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*Author's note: With this article I hope to inform the reader about the education situation in the Netherlands, especially focusing on the role of the Inspectorate, exams, and policy-oriented research in primary and secondary education. It is not offered as an official or definitive description, and any opinions are personal by nature and are not necessarily the views of the Department of Primary Education.*

## Key questions

This article focuses on the following questions:

- How is education organized in primary and secondary education?
- What is the national policy and practice with respect to student testing and examination and to assessment of school performance in primary and secondary education?
- What is the national policy with respect to the evaluation of primary and secondary education?

For those readers more interested in vocational and higher education, information in English and Dutch is available on the Department's website (www.minocw.nl).

## A short note on history

Dutch history is characterized by the struggle against the sea, as most of the country is located below sea-level. The first Dutch democratic organizations were "water-control boards," which were established in the thirteenth century. At the end of the Middle Ages, the Netherlands were ruled by the Catholic Hapsburgs. In the beginning of the sixteenth century, Calvinism spread in the country. After the Eighty Years War with Spain ended in the mid-1600s, the newly established Republic of the United Netherlands developed into a powerful sea-faring nation.

In 1848, the Constitution was changed and limited the power of the King. This new Constitution also guaranteed freedom to provide education. The Netherlands was a polarized nation for most of the twentieth century, as tightly organized social and religious groups dictated nearly every aspect of social life, including politics. Although political and social life is no longer polarized today, between 1848 and 1917, the liberals fought to keep education non-denominational, while religiously-affiliated groups wanted denominational schools with government funding.

This "schools dispute" was resolved in 1917. All primary schools were put on an equal footing, and privately run schools started to receive state funding. The constitutional freedom to establish private-sector schools that reflect a particular denominational or educational philosophy is a very important principle. As a result, there are now nearly twice as many privately run as publicly run schools. Some 70 percent of students attend (state-subsidized) privately run schools.

## Organization of schooling and student-level testing

Full-time education is compulsory from the age of five up to 17 years. Primary education (consisting of almost 7,500 primary schools and more than 300 special schools) is geared toward providing education to pupils beginning at age four up to approximately 12 years of age. National attainment targets serve as minimum objectives.

When a pupil finishes primary education, the school draws up a report providing information for the pupil's secondary school, and a copy of the report is given to the child's parents as well. By law, students must take a test at the end of primary school. While the government does not mandate the use of a specific test, over 85 percent of the schools purchase the Primary School Leavers Attainment from CITO (a Dutch research and testing company). This test consists of four

sections on language, arithmetic, study skills, and environmental studies. CITO also sells pupil-monitoring systems for all age groups. For more information, go to http://www.cito.com.

In the first two years of secondary education, a common core curriculum applies for all pupils. After that, different types of secondary education cater to students of differing abilities and interests:

- special secondary education (MAVO) (ages 12–18/20),
- pre-vocational secondary education (VMBO) (ages 12–16),
- senior general secondary education (HAVO) (ages 12–17), and
- pre-university education (VWO) (ages 12–18).

Access is partly based on assessment.

Students' final grades in secondary school are determined by a local school examination and a national examination. For some subjects, such as physical education, social studies, and arts, there is a school examination only. The national examination for VMBO consists of a written exam and, for many students, a practical component as well. All written national examinations are set and taken under the supervision of the government. Of the 159,000 pupils that obtained a secondary certificate in 2000, 64,000 obtained a HAVO or VWO certificate and 95,000 obtained a MAVO or VBO certificate. A major problem, however, is the number of students who drop out. In 2000, a total of 17,500 pupils left secondary school without any qualifications. Nearly six out of 10 dropouts came from lower secondary education.

## Monitoring school performance

A deregulation policy, devolving budgets and responsibility to each school, has been in place since the early 1980s. Schools must submit a school plan (including an overview of the organization, content of teaching, and a lesson timetable) for Inspectorate approval.

Schools can be held accountable for their performance not only by the government, but also by pupils and parents. For example, the CITO test in primary education also provides information on average performance by school, and thus participating schools can compare their performance with the national average and with the average of schools in a similar situation, controlling for pupils' backgrounds. Examination results in secondary education also provide for a reliable set of public data. Some national newspapers publish these results for all schools, and these editions receive a great deal of attention.

The Inspectorate plays an active role in quality control at the school level. The frequency and scope of inspections depend on whether institutions are able to deliver sufficient quality, for which they are able to render clear and reliable accounts. The Inspectorate also pays an annual visit to each institution to identify possible risks. Inspections at institutions that provide high-quality teaching and have a well-developed quality assurance system are less intensive. The Education Inspectorate describes its findings in report cards for each school. They contain information based on the final tests in primary education and leaving examinations in secondary education, as well as information on the general and educational climate in the school. Again, the official reports are published on the internet, and recently, the Inspectorate began publishing a list identifying the lowest-performing schools.

The national government collects much more data about schools and their students. The government has decided to facilitate the process of benchmarking and has funded a website where schools can look up their figures and compare themselves to others (http://www.onderwijsincijfers.nl; this site is in Dutch only). The information is publicly accessible.

## Assessment of student outcomes and governmental policy

In primary education, the PRIMA studies, dating back to 1988, form the main source of policy in-

formation on student outcomes. This assessment is carried out every two years in a large sample of approximately 600 primary schools and special schools. More than 30,000 pupils are assessed every two years in ISCED grades 0, 2, 4 and 6. The main variables are their results on intelligence, language, and arithmetic measures, but the assessment also includes measures of social development and students' attitudes toward school. Teachers and heads of school also complete a survey about the curriculum and their opinion of the pupils, as do parents, who are asked about the help and support given to children at home in relation to their school work and certain other factors, such as the language spoken at home and their own level of education. PRIMA data have been used for evaluating compensatory policy and the Going to School Together (WSNS) project.

Another important study commissioned by the government is a periodic assessment on educational content and the results of primary education. This assessment, conducted every five years, involves all educational domains, and it also includes subjects such as English and physical education.

In secondary education, the VOCL-cohort studies originated in 1989. This study monitors the functioning of the education system by following student careers through secondary vocational and higher education and assesses the level of ISCED grade 9 students.

PRIMA and VOCL provide benchmarks over time, allowing the monitoring of progress among subgroups within the Dutch population. International comparative studies, such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), provide for a different type of important benchmarks—comparing outcomes across countries. I will not go into great detail, but as the readers of this newsletter know, the results from these studies receive a great deal of attention from politicians, scientists, the media, professionals, and education policy makers and researchers. Both types of studies together provide for a rich source of information, which can be tapped whenever policy questions arise.

## Concluding remarks

In short, the educational system in the Netherlands is characterized by the freedom to found schools and to teach children according to specific religious or philosophical traditions. Within this educational system, attainment targets, tests, and examinations play an increasingly important role at the micro- (pupil, classroom) and meso-level (school). Their importance is growing not only because of their use by the professionals within schools who are responsible for providing pupils with the necessary education, but also because their results are used more and more often by stakeholders within and directly outside the school (e.g., local government, parents, the media, the Inspectorate).

This increased "horizontal and vertical accountability" through "hard performance figures" focusing on student-outcomes is not undisputed. It would be interesting to compare the practice of departments and schools and their use of outcomes of tests and measures during the process of policy evaluation and accountability. To my knowledge, no serious attempt has been made to compare decisions by ministers and high ranking civil servants, as well as by school boards and head-teachers, on how to interpret and use information within the organization itself and how to communicate and explain outcomes of research related to national or schools' policy.

In the Netherlands, the practice of providing Parliament with the necessary "hard information" on the outcomes of national policies has recently been evaluated by a commission. This commission has warned against too strong a focus on "simple indicators" and "benchmarks" because these cannot fully facilitate a sensible conversation between members of government and Parliament about policies and their impact on society. This commission emphasized that sometimes good indicators that measure outcomes simply do not exist and that the effectiveness of policies cannot be demonstrated by variations on values whenever good indicators do exist. The commis-

sion pled for the use of more sophisticated evaluation techniques. It seems to me that this warning against the insensitive use of "hard measures and indicators" in the process of "accountability" at the national level is very important. It should be taken seriously both within the classroom, the school, the national policy arena, and the international policy arena. A study like PISA, for example, does provide for interesting data, and the table showing the country means receives much public attention. The publication of these results should be the starting point for an interactive search for a collective, deeper understanding of the underlying educational and social processes within and across countries and educational systems.

Many Network A countries have regular assessment, testing, and examination programs that aim to provide important information on students' educational performance. This section highlights some of these programs and the activities related to them that occurred in the first half of this year.

## Assessments for national monitoring

Several countries described activities relating to large, sample-based assessment programs, which provide information for monitoring student outcomes at a national level (or, in one case, at the state/territory level).

**Australia** has a relatively new National Sample Assessments Program, which began in 2003, with each of its components being given every three years on a rotating basis. (Additional information and related reports can be found at http://www.mceetya.edu.au.)

- *National Sample Assessment in Science Literacy in Year 6*: The second cycle of this assessment will take place during the latter half of 2006. Work in the first half of the year included finalizing the test items, drawing the sample, and distributing to schools released items from the first cycle. The report from the first cycle is available on the web.
- *National Sample Assessments in Civics and Citizenship in Years 6 and 10*: This assessment was first administered in 2004. The report is in the final stages and will be available on the web before the end of 2006. Additionally, the contract for the implementation of the second cycle to be held in 2007 has been awarded.
- *National Sample Assessments in ICT in Years 6 and 10*: The first cycle of this assessment took place in 2005. Recent work has included data analysis and drafting of the report, and consultations also were held with curriculum experts to identify a "proficient" standard of achievement at each year level for monitoring and reporting purposes.

In addition to the National Sample Assessments, Australia is conducting field trials for common national assessments in literacy (reading, writing, and spelling) and numeracy for Years 3, 5, 7, and 9. Currently, each State and Territory conducts its own assessments in Years 3, 5, and 7, with some also administering state-level assessments in Year 9. Recent activities related to these assessments include: developing, piloting, and reviewing test instruments; developing test procedures and administration guidelines; conducting the trial in a national sample of schools in May; developing marking keys and arrangements for online marking; and marking the trial assessments in June.

**France** has been engaged in several national-level assessment activities. First, work has been underway for the field test of its planned annual national assessment on basic skills in French and mathematics for students in grades 5 and 9. The sample size for this assessment was approximately 15,000 students in each grade. Second, the main administration of assessments of 5th- and 9th-grade students' competencies in history and geography occurred in May and June. Assessments of these subjects are to be given every five years to a sample of about 6,000 students in each grade. Our correspondent noted that assessments this spring were particularly difficult to conduct due to strikes within the school system.

**Mexico** described a number of activities related to national assessments in the first half of 2006. A national assessment was given in May to a sample of about 55,000 3rd-grade students, while assessments in 6th and 9th grades (the final years of primary and lower secondary education) are being finalized. The latter assessments will include, for the first time, open-response questions to assess students' writing skills. Additionally, work is in the final stages to develop instruments for an assessment of students in their last year of preschool (about 5 years old). This assessment will be given for the first time in 2007.

**New Zealand** reported that administration of its national assessment study, the National Educa-

tion Monitoring Project (NEMP), took place in the first half of 2006. Assessments in language (writing, listening, and viewing) and health and physical education were administered to students in Years 4 and 8.

## Tests for student and school monitoring

Several countries described programs that focus primarily on providing information at the student level.

**Austria** administers the *Salzburger Lesescreening* (SLS), which is an instrument for testing the reading ability of students and, in particular, for identifying poor performers in reading in order to offer individual reading training programs. The SLS was established in 2002-03 in grades 1-4 and grades 5-8. The SLS framework is related to psychological theories and scientific results in the area of reading research. For more information on SLS, go to www.bmbwk.gv.at, www.klassezukunft.at, or www.lesefit.at; or contact the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture (Reinhard.Streyhammer@bmbwk.gv.at or Johann.Walter@bmbwk.gv.at).

In addition to its assessment activities, the *Secretaría de Educación Pública* (National Education Ministry) in **Mexico** conducted a census testing of almost 12 million students in grades 3-6 and grade 9 in every primary and lower secondary school in the country.

Finally, in **Sweden**, annual national tests were administered in Swedish/Swedish as a second language, English, and mathematics in grades 9 and 5 (optional). Test construction and development is a continuous process over the course of two years. The tests are mandatory for the teachers but not for the students, although in practice almost all students participate. The main purpose of the program is to support student results, to serve as a diagnostic tool, to exemplify goals and performance standards, to support fair and equal marking (in grade 9 only; no marks in grade 5), and to serve as a tool for accountability. The assessments are used for both summative and formative purposes; or, in other words, they serve as "assessments of learning as well as assessments for learning." Tests are scored by teachers, and the results are reported to the National Agency for Education and published on its web site.

## Standards development

Two countries described work to develop education standards that will form the basis of future assessment programs.

In **Austria**, work is underway on *Bildungsstandards* (educational standards), which will be introduced in grades 4, 8, and 12 in 2008. The goal of this program is to establish educational standards, identifying competencies that students should acquire in specific grades, for both general and vocational education (VET). The standards will focus on each subject's core area and will define the subject's relevance to general education, the expected learning outcomes, and the specific tasks and exercises that require application of the relevant knowledge and skills. The purposes of establishing education standards are to continuously enhance the quality of teaching and learning; to provide feedback about education quality and school performance at the system level; to compare school performance at the provider level (benchmarking); to reduce between- and within-school variance in student performance; and to ensure comparability among schools, which are self-governing. The first step was to develop standards for the teaching of German, mathematics, and English at general education schools. In 2005, the standards for mathematics in 8th grade were tested at about 40 schools. Current work includes preparing a report on these results as well as developing standards for VET schools. More information on *Bildungsstandards* is available at the following websites: www.bmbwk.gv.at/medienpool/11369/pa_bildungsstandards.pdf; www.bmbwk.gv.at/medienpool/12093/bildungsstandards_folder.pdf; www.bmbwk.gv.at/Schulen/unterricht/ba/bildungsstandards.xml; www.gemeinsamlernen.at/index2.asp ;www.dieneueschule.gv.at; and

www.klassezukunft.at; or by contacting the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture (Andreas.Schatzl@bmbwk.gv.at).

In **Switzerland**, work is continuing on the HarmoS project, established by the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education. This project is defining national standards of education in the mother language, a primary foreign language, mathematics, and science in the 2nd, 6th, and 9th grades. These criteria will become the basis for future assessments to measure how well students meet these standards. The project is currently in the test construction and piloting phase.

## International and regional activities

Many Network A countries also participate in various international student assessment programs. The following activities were occurring at the international level in:

- PIRLS, the 4th-grade reading literacy assessment administered under the auspices of IEA:
  - o Main data collection for PIRLS 2006 in countries in the Northern Hemisphere
  - o Training for scoring main survey-constructed response items
- TIMSS, the 4th- and 8th-grade mathematics and science achievement assessment administered under the auspices of IEA:
  - o Translation verification for the TIMSS 2007 field test
  - o Administration of the field test
  - o Training for scoring constructed-response items for the field test
- PISA, the assessment of reading, mathematics, and science literacy administered under the auspices of OECD:
  - o Planning, preparation, and training for PISA 2006
  - o Administration of the PISA 2006 assessment in countries in the Northern Hemisphere

Finally, one country reported on a regional-level assessment. In May, **Mexico** administered the second wave of the regional assessment of 4th-grade mathematics and reading organized by the Latin American Laboratory for the Assessment of Educational Quality.

This newsletter is published under the auspices of Network A. Network A, which is primarily concerned with indicators of learner outcomes, is one of several working groups that are part of OECD's International Indicators of Education Systems (INES) Project. The newsletter is prepared by Eugene Owen (Network A Senior Advisor) and Jay Moskowitz (Network A Chair), Maria Stephens, and Euhwa Tran of the American Institutes for Research with contributions from Network A members. The newsletter was designed by Charmaine Llagas.

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